

Increase in Immigration Enforcement

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Key Takeaways

- + Immigration enforcement increased substantially in January 2025 under the second Trump administration.
- + Prior research indicates that immigration enforcement has little impact on violent crime, with the estimated effect of increases in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detentions on violent offenses often close to zero.
- + Several factors complicate linking the recent expansion of immigration enforcement to declining homicide: Homicide levels began dropping well before 2025, the 2025 immigration enforcement surge disproportionately targeted nonviolent immigrants, and homicides declined across states regardless of their cooperation with federal immigration authorities.

Theoretical Mechanisms

There are several ways immigration enforcement could reduce homicide in the United States. At the border, immigration enforcement may prevent would-be criminals from entering. Within the U.S., two mechanisms are potentially operative. Increased immigration arrests, detentions, and deportations¹ could incapacitate dangerous offenders. In the same vein, enhanced immigration enforcement might deter immigrants from committing crimes. However, there are theoretical reasons to anticipate that immigration enforcement may have minimal impact on homicide trends. This could occur if immigrants already have low violent offending rates, immigration enforcement does not target violent criminals, or if immigration enforcement does not enhance incapacitation or deterrence beyond existing criminal punishments.

Established Evidence

Immigration and Crime

Whether immigration enforcement reduces homicide at least partially depends on the underlying relationship between immigration and violent crime. This question has

received significant criminological attention. Though studies are not unanimous, there is very little evidence linking immigration to higher homicide rates in the U.S. Rather, the weight of evidence suggests that immigrants tend to commit proportionally less violent crime, and the broader relationship between immigration and violence is generally negative (less violent crime) or null (no relationship between immigration and violence). This is true whether studies examine larger geographic units (e.g., neighborhoods, cities, counties, etc.),² immigrant incarceration rates,³ arrest rates among immigrants,⁴ or undocumented immigrants specifically.⁵

Immigration Enforcement and Crime

Though less extensive than the research on immigration and crime, there are now several studies that speak directly to the question, does immigration enforcement reduce crime? The two most comprehensive of these studies focused on the Secure Communities (S-Comm) program, a nationwide, mandatory, data-sharing policy between local law enforcement and the federal government where fingerprints from local arrests were screened for immigration violations by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). These studies are particularly informative because S-Comm represented the largest expansion of local law enforcement in immigration control in the nation's history and was foundational to creating the information-sharing infrastructure that links routine local criminal justice activities to federal immigration enforcement to this day.

The staggered rollout of the S-Comm program that began in 2008 is useful for understanding its effectiveness because it created a natural policy experiment. That is, researchers were able to compare counties before and after the implementation of S-Comm to counties where S-Comm had not yet been activated. Both Miles and Cox (2014)⁶ and Treyger, Chalfin, and Loeffler (2014)⁷ leveraged the timing of S-Comm to examine these comparisons. Despite some methodological differences, both analyses reached similar conclusions: S-Comm had no observable effect on violent crime generally, or homicide specifically. According to Treyger et al. (2014: 285), this is likely because “[n]oncitizens removed through Secure Communities either would have been incapacitated even in the absence of the program or do not pose an identifiable risk to community safety.” For instance, the largest increase under the S-Comm program involved removals of those convicted of criminal traffic offenses.

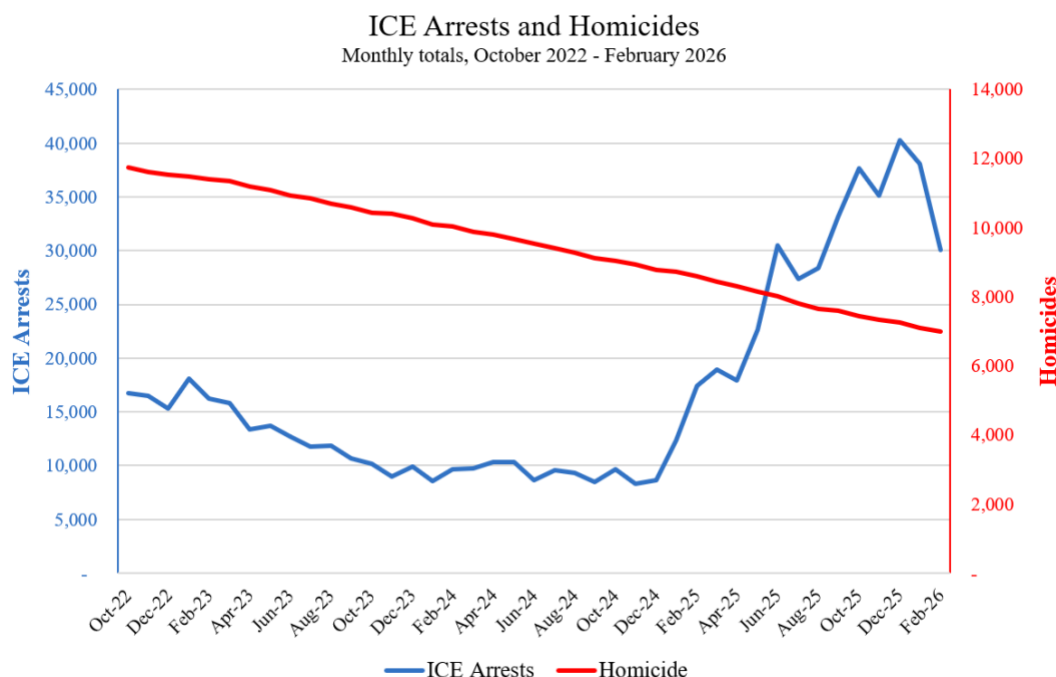
A third study⁸ conducted by researchers at the CATO Institute examined the relationship between immigration enforcement and crime by focusing on the 287(g) program. Named after Section 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act,⁹ the program involves voluntary agreements that delegate immigration enforcement powers to state and local law enforcement agencies. Using data from North Carolina, Forrester and Nowrasteh (2020) measured both the timing of 287(g) activations and the relative intensity of 287(g) enforcement across counties. The researchers found no evidence that the program's adoption lowered rates of murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, or motor vehicle theft.

Recent Evidence

The scope, scale, and intensity of immigration enforcement under the second Trump administration have increased substantially. An analysis by the Migration Policy Institute¹⁰ shows that the administration took more than 500 immigration actions in its first year, more than the 472 across all four years of Trump's first term. During this period, ICE arrests quadrupled, the average number of daily immigrant detentions doubled, and the number of 287(g) agreements increased 10-fold¹¹ between January 2025 and January 2026. But several facts complicate attempts to link these trends to recent declines in homicide.

The first is timing. Following the substantial increase in homicides in 2020 and 2021, homicides have been decreasing considerably since 2022.¹² Figure 1 compares the trends in homicide (presented as a 12-month rolling average) with arrests by ICE since 2022. The pattern does not suggest that the spike in ICE arrests in 2025 drove homicide declines. Rather, it is clear that homicides began falling several years prior to the administration's aggressive immigration enforcement initiatives.

Figure 1. Comparing ICE Arrests and Homicides, October 2022 - February 2026



Notes: ICE arrests are shown as monthly totals. Homicide counts are shown as a rolling 12-month total.

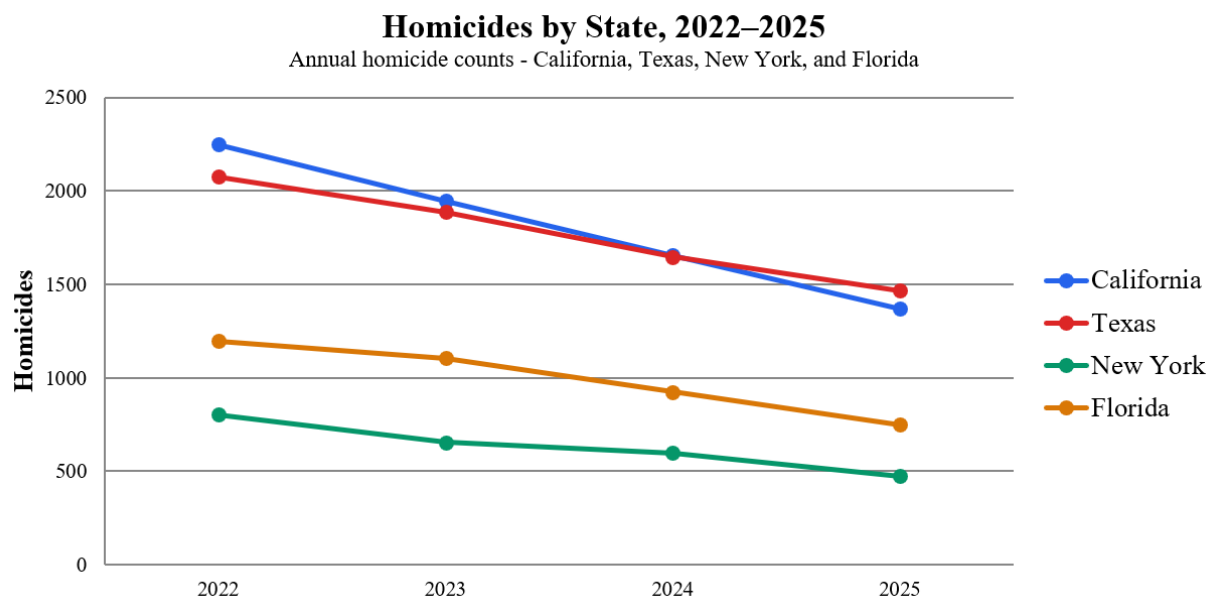
Sources: ICE arrest data are available at <https://ice-arrests.apps.deportationdata.org/>. Homicide data are available at <https://crimeindex.org/current?topic=crime&stat=murder&geo=us&size=all>

The second consideration is the targets of the recent surge in immigration enforcement. The overwhelming majority¹ of noncitizens arrested in 2025 either had no prior criminal convictions or were previously convicted of nonviolent offenses. Comparing the six months before the inauguration to January 2026, an analysis by the Deportation Data Project¹ shows that the number of people arrested by ICE without prior convictions increased 8-fold and arrests of people with nonviolent convictions doubled. By comparison, ICE arrests of noncitizens convicted of violent crimes changed little. Therefore, it is questionable whether the 2025 increase in immigration enforcement targeted noncitizens who pose a serious risk to public safety.

A third consideration is the geographic scope of the homicide declines relative to immigration enforcement. ICE arrests increased in nearly every state in 2025, but immigration enforcement initiatives clearly targeted some states more than others. If immigration enforcement drove the homicide decline, we would expect steeper declines in states with the most aggressive enforcement. The data do not support this pattern. ICE arrests increased by more than 51,000 between 2024 and 2025 in Texas (up from 31,565 in 2024). In California, the increase was only about 21,000 (up from 7,681)—slightly smaller than Florida's increase of 22,086 (from 10,083)¹³—even though California

is estimated to have a substantially larger population of undocumented immigrants (2.25 million in California compared to 1.6 million in Florida).¹⁴ In New York, the increase in ICE arrests was limited to approximately 7,000 (from 4,092 in 2024). These differences likely reflect the differential embrace of immigration enforcement policies in these states. State laws in both Texas¹⁵ and Florida¹⁶ mandate that local law enforcement agencies cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. California¹⁷ and New York,¹⁸ by contrast, severely limit cooperation with federal immigration authorities. Figure 2 displays the homicide trends in each of these states. Comparing California and New York with Texas and Florida provides little evidence that differences in immigration enforcement intensity account for the reductions in homicide.

Figure 2: Yearly Homicide Counts for Selected Agencies in California, Texas, New York, and Florida



Sources: Current homicide counts are available at <https://crimeindex.org/historical?topic=crime&stat=murder&geo=us&year=2025>.

None of these factors are conclusive on their own, but together they point to explanations other than increased immigration enforcement for the recent declines in homicide. This interpretation is in line with previous research on immigration enforcement and crime.

Future Directions

Any conclusions about public safety benefits produced by the recent expansion of immigration enforcement are necessarily tentative. More systematic evidence is clearly warranted. Most importantly, longitudinal research that evaluates multiple explanations

for the reductions in homicide—including changes in offending patterns, policing, incarceration, drug markets, employment, and community violence interventions—is needed. A second key area of inquiry concerns changes in ICE's apprehension methods. Prior to the second Trump administration, custodial transfers—those that involve transfers of custody from jails or prisons to ICE—were the workhorse of interior immigration enforcement. But in 2025, ICE substantially increased the number of arrests in communities and at ICE check-ins, so called “street arrests.”¹ This means that ICE is now far more visible to the public, which may enhance deterrence. But these tactics could also produce unintended collateral consequences, pointing to a third area warranting research. A recent study found¹⁹ that the S-Comm program increased victimization among Hispanics but reduced the likelihood that Hispanic victims reported crimes to the police. Whether the recent expansion of immigration enforcement produces similar consequences remains an open empirical question.

Prepared for CCJ Homicide Decline Research Summit

The United States has experienced a sharp decline in homicide since the middle of 2022. This dramatic and largely unexpected shift has sparked a high-stakes debate about what is driving it. To examine the plausibility of dozens of potential factors, CCJ convened a two-day summit in September 2026 with about 50 researchers from criminology, economics, public health, psychology, sociology, and related disciplines. This brief was prepared to inform discussions during the convening.

Endnotes

¹ Blair, Graeme and David Hausman. 2026. “One Year of Immigration Enforcement Under the Second Trump Administration.” *Deportation Data Project*. Available at:

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³ Abramitzky, Ran, Leah Boustan, Elisa Jácome, Santiago Pérez, and Juan David Torres. 2024. “Law-Abiding Immigrants: The Incarceration Gap between Immigrants and the US-Born, 1870–2020.” *American Economic Review: Insights* 6 (4): 453–71.

⁴ Light, Michael T., Laura Boisten and Jungmyung Kim. 2024 “The Empirics of Immigration and Violence: Evidence from California and Texas.” Pp. 232-48 in *Taking Stock of Homicide: Trends, Emerging Themes, and the Challenges*.

⁵ See Light, Michael T. and Ty Miller. 2018. “Does Undocumented Immigration Increase Violent Crime?” *Criminology* 56: 370-401. Gunadi, Christian. 2021. “On the association between undocumented immigration and crime in the United States.” *Oxford Economic Papers* 73(1): 200–224. Light, Michael T.,

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⁷ Treyger, Elina, Aaron Chalfin, and Charles Loeffler. 2014. "Immigration Enforcement, Policing, and Crime." *Criminology & Public Policy* 13(2): 285-322

⁸ Forrester, Andrew and Alex Nowrasteh. 2020. "Do Immigration Enforcement Programs Reduce Crime? Evidence from the 287(g) Program in North Carolina." *The Center for Growth and Opportunity Working Paper* 2020.004. Available at: <https://www.thecgo.org/research/do-immigration-enforcement-programs-reduce-crime/>

⁹ U.S. Congress. (1952). Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101–1537. Available at: <https://www.uscis.gov/laws-and-policy/legislation/immigration-and-nationality-act>

¹⁰ Chishti, Muzaffar, Kathleen Bush-Joseph and Colleen Putzel-Kavanaugh. 2026. "Unleashing Power in New Ways: Immigration in the First Year of Trump 2.0." *Migration Policy Institute*. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/journal/policy-beat/unleashing-power-new-ways-immigration-first-year-trump-20>

¹¹ Rose, Felicity. 2026. "Force Multiplier": How ICE is Promising Billions to Local Law Enforcement to Expand Its Reach in Dangerous Ways." *FWD.us*. Available at: <https://www.fwd.us/news/force-multiplier-how-ice-is-promising-billions-to-local-law-enforcement-to-expand-its-reach-in-dangerous-ways/>

¹² Lopez, Ernesto and Bobby Boxerman. 2026. "Crime Trends in U.S. Cities: Year-End 2025 Update." *Council on Criminal Justice*. Available at <https://counciloncj.org/crime-trends-in-u-s-cities-year-end-2025-update/#homicide>

¹³ Data available at <https://deportationdata.org/data/processed/ice.html#latest-data-release>

¹⁴ Passel, Jeffery S. and Jens Manuel Krogstad. 2025. "U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population Reached a Record 14 Million in 2023." *Pew Research Center*. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2025/08/21/u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-population-reached-a-record-14-million-in-2023/>

¹⁵ 2017 Sanctuary Cities SB 4, *Regular Session*: S.B. 4, 85th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Tex. 2017). Available at: <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=884&Bill=SB4>

¹⁶ Florida Sheriffs Association. 2025. "Florida Sheriffs Association Announces 287(g) Compliance in All County Jails." Available at: <https://flsheriffs.org/blog/entry/florida-sheriffs-association-announces-287g-compliance-in-all-county-jails/>

¹⁷ S.B. 54, 2017–2018 Reg. Sess. The California Values Act. Available at: https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180SB54

¹⁸ New York Executive Order No. 170 (*State Policy Concerning Immigrant Access to State Services*). Available at: https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/EO_%23_170.pdf

¹⁹ Gonçalves, Felipe, Elisa Jácome, and Emily Weisburst. 2024. "Immigration Enforcement and Public Safety." *NBER Working Paper* 32109. Available at: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w32109>